University of London
INSTITUTE OF COMMONWEALTH STUDIES

VOICE FILE NAME: COHP (Dr Neville Linton)

Key:
SO: Sue Onslow (Interviewer)
NL: Neville Linton (Respondent)

SO: This is Sue Onslow talking to Dr Neville Linton at Senate House on Tuesday, 16th July 2013. Neville, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to add your recollections to those of the Witness Seminar on the Commonwealth Secretariat.

I wonder if you could comment, please, on how you became involved in the Commonwealth and the Secretariat, before reflecting on the value of the Commonwealth's activities?

NL: Well, it really relates to my general interest in international relations - that's my field as an academic - particularly in the growth of international organizations post World War II, and the role that they could play in creating a better world. I didn't think that such a world would happen fast enough, but it did under the pressure of the new international institutions. Of course the Commonwealth was such a player. So, as a member of a Commonwealth country, I knew of its existence and possibly had inflated ideas of what it is and what it does, rather than the reality. I didn't have any real grasp of the role of the Commonwealth.

But, it so happens that I was teaching at the University of Alberta, in the Political Science Department there. In the room next to me was Professor J King Gordon who had been the highest-ranking Canadian official at the UN Secretariat and, on retirement, had joined the department. I was about to make my first trip to Britain, even though I had visited Europe before. As a 'colonial', I was not particularly eager to see this place.

So, King said to me, "Arnold Smith has just become Secretary General of the Commonwealth. It'd be interesting for you to meet him, given your field of interest. I will write a note to introduce you to him. So, I came up to London, intending to only be here a couple of weeks and dropped in to see Arnold Smith - this was in the very first year of the Secretariat – and saw Arnold Smith who was one of these very charming, "hail fellow, well met" people. He said, "Look, we're about to hold the first Heads of Government meeting. Because these meetings hitherto were run by the British Foreign Office, the Secretariat will be doing it for the first time". He said, "I

have very little staff". He says, "Why don't you stay and work with us on this? It'd be interesting for you." He quickly convinced me.

I went to find a flat. (This has to do with racism in Britain. It's really not about the Commonwealth. It's about a black trying to find a flat.) Anyhow, I got a place to live and I joined the Secretariat temporarily for that summer.

SO: What was your position?

NL: They created some title that I don't remember. Emeka Anyaoku and I were the only professional/diplomatic staff in International Affairs (IAD), a section lead by a senior Brit from the Foreign Office. The staff for the Secretariat generally was very thin. Of course, the majority of senior staff at that stage was British.

SO: So, the Head of IAD was Tom Aston?

NL: Yes. That was where I first met Emeka Anyaoku and also Patsy Robertson who was in the Information Division. So, I was working with Emeka really and, of course, Tom. You know, I had to do a lot of stuff from scratch because I hadn't a practical diplomatic background. It was a very busy and interesting time because what was being discussed there was Rhodesia. This was the meeting where there was the big battle at that heads meeting was over Rhodesia. I well remember that there was a normal lunch break. The time of the break ended and the Heads were coming back, except the African Heads were not there.

I remember the sight of Harold Wilson walking up and down with his pipe, fuming because he'd never been kept waiting before, I suppose, and this had never happened at a Heads of Government meeting. What was occurring was that the African leaders were caucusing, as was the practice at the UN. Commonwealth practice so far had not included such caucusing and lobby tactics. However, the Africans simply were acting in a manner they were familiar with and needed to consult over this crucial matter. It meant they came back as a group, and were insistent on a change of British policy on Rhodesia.

I worked through to the end of the summer, and that experience perked my interest in Secretariat. But I didn't actually follow it up. From Alberta I went back to the Caribbean, to the Graduate Institute of International Relations that had been set up there by the Swiss as a branch of the Geneva Institute, and worked there for a few years.

During that time, my links with Emeka continued and I would see him any time he came to Trinidad and Tobago. In the course of time, Sonny Ramphal had become Secretary General. I had been aware of Sonny as a senior prefect at my school. After finishing school a group of us young men, interested in the development of the country, organized a discussion group to debate the politics and the way forward. We invited Ramphal to be our Speaker at our first dinner, because he was a star in the government as far as we were concerned. This was in the last phase before independence.

Post independence, despite its small size, Guyana had a profile at the Non-Aligned meetings (NAM), not just because of Forbes Burnham who was quite an excellent speaker, but also because of the influence of his Foreign Minister, Sonny Ramphal. The Non-Aligned Movement eventually decided to also have foreign ministers meetings. Guyana offered to host the first such meeting. Burnham offered to host the

first one. This was really quite an enormous thing for them to do. Guyana wasn't quite as poor as it is now, but it was very poor. It certainly had never held an international conference of that level or scale before. It didn't have the accommodation. There was one hotel that might have been called a first class hotel at international level and that would have had a couple of suitable suites. Some 30 odd states could be attending. They had to import a fleet of cars for the occasion.

So Guyana was hosting the first meeting of NAM Foreign Ministers. As host country, it provided the Secretariat for such a meeting. Given its resources it needed to supplement the needed staff for such a conference. In that connection it appointed two advisors - one political, one economic. I was appointed political advisor and also another person from the University of the West Indies, a well-known international economist, Alister McIntyre was invited to be the Economic Adviser. So, I went down to that meeting.

So both Sonny and Emeka could know of my interest in international organisation work. I didn't want to be an academic. While I went and studied international issues at a post-graduate level, I was not intending to do a doctorate. I was hoping to work in the Foreign Service of the Federation of the West Indies, which was about to become independent. The country that I was from didn't want to join the Federation initially, because it had this leftist, Marxist government of Cheddi Jagan. They didn't like what had developed and so they were not members of the Federation. So, when the Foreign Service of the Federation was being created, I really didn't have a chance.

The graduate school that I went to is a leading graduate school for diplomacy and international relations in the United States.

SO: The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy?

NL: Exactly. The interim Federal government of the Federation sent two of its top people to Fletcher to arrange for the training of people for their diplomatic service. So, the Dean says, "Oh, we have a chap here". They said, "yes" and then realized who the chap was. From there, they said, "Thanks a lot, but no." *[Laughter].* They were not interested in me because Guyana was not a member of the Federation.

In 1983 I got a call from Emeka "There's a post here at the Secretariat. We've gone through everyone, shortlisted everyone and we're still not satisfied and we remembered you had an interest. So, if you are available, could you come up and be interviewed?" I came up and I was interviewed by the usual board which included the then Head of PAD, Hugh Craft, and they took me on. When I went to Human Resources, the head said to me, 'Well, you are a first because we have noticed that the Guyanese don't tend to get appointed." Ramphal was scrupulous in not privileging his own countrymen.

SO: You joined in the Secretariat in the year of the New Delhi CHOGM?

NL: That was a valuable introduction to the job.

SO: What was your impression of that CHOGM meeting?

NL: It was an introduction to a set of Commonwealth Heads who were politically active because non-alignment and South-south issues then were very prominent in

their foreign policies. It was the height of the Grenada crisis. In fact, it had happened the month that I left Trinidad to come up here.

SO: In the October of 1983?

NL: Yes. So, the Grenada issue was on the agenda. The Caribbean states were very concerned about the implications re: the security of small states - even though some had colluded with the Americans - they raised the question of what objectively could be done in the international system to protect them. That concern was not necessarily that big states should not be invited to help, but how can they be best helped if they get into security situations. This concerned both political and economic security. Some had objected to the way in which America intervened. That's how small states got on the agenda. Subsequently the small states project developed to include environmental and economic issues.

SO: There were Caribbean leaders who had effectively solicited American intervention, Eugenia Charles being one of them.

NL: The majority did because they were all small islands; some were very, very small, and felt vulnerable. As you know regionally, there are two levels. There's the micro-association in the Caribbean and then there's the bigger CARICOM which includes everyone. All the micro-states were certainly concerned if something like the overthrow of the Maurice Bishop government could happen in Grenada, it could happen to any micro-state. They'd be looking for help. The UK had not indicated any readiness for serious intervention. In fact, it was the prime minister of the regional country that most people associated with links to the UK, Barbados, who told the Grenadian Governor General “Don't depend on British intervention. It's not going to happen.” So, Barbados advised turning to America for assistance, knowing that the US thought of the Caribbean as 'being' in its own backyard.

SO: From your particular standpoint as a Caribbean national, what was your perception of Cuba at the time?

NL: My perception of Cuba was that it was an openly Marxist state. It was a problem for regional governments. But, it had an attractive and dynamic leader who was playing a significant and, for the Third World, a useful role on the world stage. It's an openly Marxist state and it meant that where there were socialist parties, whether Marxist or not, they had links with Cuba.

In the particular case of Guyana: I remember Cheddi Jagan as head of an openly Marxist party, the PPP, but who was also a trade union leader, marching ahead of big demonstrations through the streets. Prominently displayed in the front line would be posters with pictures of Marx, Stalin and Lenin. Communist literature was freely distributed. In Jamaica an openly Marxist party existed, but it was never anywhere near power.

If you've had a colony with a colonial education in a part of the world that's created, you're not colonies that were colonized by a foreign power. You're not an old people colonized by a foreign power. We are created societies. The whole North American and Caribbean region is New World Societies. So the societies in their culture are fundamentally at core British, French, Spanish, or Dutch. The original cultures did not survive with significant strength. Most of that was driven out, particularly that of the Africans. Their languages were attacked as a means of control and other cultural

practices (such as religion). It was when the Indians came as indentured labour – not slaves – that they were allowed to preserve much of their culture.

So there was no natural love of country. Your independence developed as a modern concept; that you should be independent as a place. It isn't rooted in an old society that had been conquered by another. So, in that sense, the New World is different from the rest. (The American Black Power movement highlighted the whole questions of 'roots' and re-ignited desires to relate and understand African culture.)

So, as New World colonies, we grew up believing in what you're educated in. So, socialism and all of that? That's a very uphill task. There's never been any strong socialism in the Commonwealth Caribbean. This reflection's very interesting in that respect. In contrast, in the French speaking Caribbean, there was even a Marxist head of government – a reflection of the strength of the Communist party in France. I remember being back in the Caribbean and at this institute teaching, going up and down the Caribbean was a great exposure because we had all tended to live in our own inherited imperial cocoons. (The English, French, Spanish and Dutch speaking people tended to mix very little.) To some extent, it's really a nonsense because I used to say this when I go out; people are not looking at themselves. We are each carrying the prejudices of our imperial inheritance. So, we have attitudes to the French that are really British attitudes that we've inherited; or the Dutch have their attitudes too, you know. All of that around the place; so, we don't want to particularly visit Martinique because it's French *[laughter].* In those days if they were going any place it was straight north.

SO: You are describing these mental political maps as the remaining imprints of the colonizer?

NL: In fact I grew up in Guyana and later I went to Trinidad. My passport is now Trinidad. In Guyana it was also the thing about 'development'. I hear such nonsense. I have a simple statement to tell people, "Nobody has a colony to develop the colony. The colony is managed in the interest of the imperial country." So, you take Guyana. The various imperials came and took hold. It was not an island that you could get a hold that easily and the interior is very difficult. So, nobody is trying to get inside. The working reality of Guyana is a strip along the coast; not a very deep strip either. Everybody in there is looking out. That's my point. They're not looking in. For one thing, the future of that place - and it has many possibilities and it can be great It will do it, it is so rich - is inside. Up until now it hasn't been touched significantly, save for mineral extraction.

But they're certainly not learning either Dutch or Spanish, you know. I went to school and of two foreign languages taught one was Latin; if you were in Trinidad, it was Greek. And the other was French. In fact it's striking what independence does. I remember well that with independence the curriculum was changed throughout the whole region. They created their own certificate and made it more germane. The curriculum at the few elite schools, created initially for the white population and the imperial colonial civil service that moved out up and down the empire, in the Caribbean were linked into the English grammar school system. Grammar school education was provided initially by churches, and later by governments, in the mode of the UK schools. The curriculum was the same, the exams were on the same syllabus and date, and papers were sent to the UK for marking. So you had to wait months to get your results!

On my first trip to the Caribbean region, I was an academic doing various things. I go to Martinique and I land at the airport at Martinique and I am shocked because it's an airport unlike any airport in the Caribbean, because Martinique is France. It's a *departement* and it has all of the associated facilities. So, it's a decent airport. Then I drive on a decent road going into the city. I ask what building is that? It is a school with facilities not in most of the independent Caribbean. They had decent hospitals and schools and structures and so on that I do not see anywhere in the independent territories of the West Indies. There's this genuine part of France there. In the hotel, in the morning when I look into the papers, that day's papers of Paris are there, flown in overnight on Air France. So, this is stressing how we are all in our image of the mother country, and with their belief structure. The reason I got on this is within that belief structure and how you do politics. All of those other territories, unlike the British territories, are multi-party and government often is a coalition. In the case of Martinique and Guadeloupe, the Communist Party existed with a strength which would not have happened in any of the existing territories.

SO: Neville, in your experience, how far did the Non-Aligned Movement enable you to alter your political geography and your mental political maps?

NL: The Non-Aligned Movement was a great contribution in that respect. But it wasn't just the Non-Aligned Movement. It would be that in Africa you had leaders of a standard which Africa today is not in sniffing distance of having save, oddly enough, for leaders such as President Kagame of Rwanda. It wasn't the one or two: there were a number. So, you had people who had ideas and whom one could respect. Those leaders happened to be in the Commonwealth at that stage.

SO: Did you have a sense then, in 1983, of rival international organizations? You talked about the Non-Aligned Movement being a great enabler of multi-identities, the contact it provided with extraordinary charismatic, intellectually focused leaders and, of course, major liberation leaders. How far did the Commonwealth strengthen the Caribbean in the international system, or was that the purpose of the Non-Aligned Movement?

NL: The purpose of the NAM was certainly not to enable the Caribbean to do anything. The NAM was used to heighten the influence and capacity of its member states, and it could do this better than the Commonwealth. During the Cold War, the leaders of the NAM had a profile and an influence that obviously today they do not have.

It was the NAM which kicked Ramphal into the job here, because all of those states would have voted for him and would have been part of the push. There is the importance of the particular link between Forbes Burnham and Ramphal. Ramphal was the only Foreign Minister in the Caribbean on who was allowed to fly to international meetings in the Caribbean. In other Caribbean countries, the office of Prime Minister was possessive about being the 'face' of foreign policy. For example, when you thought of foreign policy in Jamaica, you thought of Michael Manley, not his foreign minister. So Ramphal was unusual among island countries in being an international face. It allowed him to gain prominence and exposure, which served him well. Hence he had NAM heads behind him in his bid for the secretary general position. He had done a terrific job to run such a conference under challenging circumstances.

A key outcome of that NAM Foreign Ministers' conference was the decision to research and develop the possibilities of South/South trade and cooperation.

Subsequently, the first meeting to discuss this project cooperation was held in Guyana, and Alister and I went down for that. Subsequently, a secretariat was created. In terms of what subsequently would get me to be interested with the Commonwealth, it was that exposure to working with Ramphal. He was just a great person to work for and work with.

SO: Neville, at the time what was the standing in people's minds of the Non-Aligned Movement versus the Commonwealth as a global sub-system?

NL: If you picked up a newspaper at the time and you go through it, you'll not see references about the Commonwealth. The Non-Aligned Movement was certainly in the news. After all, what in all even fairness could the Commonwealth be in the news that the Guyana journalists might be interested in? The same would be true of a Canadian newspaper. There wasn't any day-to-day news coverage on the Commonwealth. It's in the news at the time about the Heads of Government meeting and then it disappears from the news. It goes even deeper than that. What are the problems? Until the Commonwealth is genuinely of interest to either the prime minister or the foreign ministry of those states, it's not there. They remember it before Heads of Government meetings.

You don't have staff who are following the Commonwealth from meeting to meeting in the Foreign Ministry, in contrast to the staff following what the US, and Venezuela is going. In the days when there was Non-Aligned, there certainly was a couple of people following the Non-Aligned Movement all the time. There's nobody following the Commonwealth in the Foreign Ministry of Tobago and Trinidad, or Barbados. This is really the nature of the Commonwealth: it is sectional. Hence topics and issues will be going to separate responsible ministries. In the UK, there is an FCO officer supposedly following the Commonwealth, but they would also be responsible for other matters.

SO: Therefore, that's a reflection not simply of small foreign ministries and small bureaucracies. It's a question of political interest?

NL: Yes. Exactly. A suggestion of what the Commonwealth's role is and what it does. Technical assistance is the one thing they all will get at least out of the Commonwealth. Although CFTC funding was small scale, it had a record of being good.

SO: When you came to join the Secretariat, did you feel that you were taking a step down in joining this small organization?

NL: No, no, no. I had been an academic. I had always wanted to work in international relations. This is an opportunity to work in international relations.

SO: But in terms of hierarchies, you have indicated the Non-Aligned Movement was streets ahead?

NL: The Non-Aligned Movement at that stage, even then, centred on the summit of the Heads. It was initially no big secretariat. Subsequently, the one that was created for practical purposes was the South/South. But these meetings developed or tried to look at ways and studies on how do you develop South-South trade. It's now happening, and in a way in which people are getting worried about it, because it involves a giant economy like China. *[Laughter].*

SO: China, and other 'Emerging Actors.' *[Laughter].* Yes.

NL: But these were the beginning of studies to see how these countries could trade with each other, not North-South. North-South is drainage and South-South can be a more creative development.

SO: So this was a symbiotic relationship, enhancing national development? Therefore Sonny Ramphal became Secretary General, having been an important, prominent Foreign Minister in the Non-Aligned Movement, came into the Commonwealth Secretariat with ideas that have had their original genesis in the Non-Aligned Movement?

NL: Yes. That's why he had all of these special studies that they decided, brought in groups of people to do things, and do papers and so on which were very important at the time.

SO: Did Sonny have a particular officer that was following the Non-Aligned Movement Heads of Government meetings at the Secretariat?

NL: Yes. One of his assistants in his office would have followed these issues, as Ramphal was on every major topical international commission. (This was the time when international commissions were fashionable to look at issues which governments and other international institutions were not addressing. Because of the Cold War, other major international issues were not being dealt with, such as climate change). The various topics included South-South trade and disarmament.

SO: But, did Sonny Ramphal go on attending Non-Aligned Movement meetings as an observer in any way, after he became Secretary General? He had senior diplomatic status, even if he wasn't a formal head of government.

NL: No, no, he couldn't. He was enacting his own role now. Then he created a role of his own. He was the only person who was invited to be a member of every one of those international commissions that were the big thing of those days. Every one! One reason he was on was because of any commission that he's on, he offers ideas and suggestions and he's very happy to help you draft all the final declarations; meetings always like people who are ready to do the draft. That is part of the technique of Ramphal; not eat you up with ideas, but he'd be ready to have someone of his staff who was with him to throw out the draft of what is needed.

SO: When you witnessed the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting of 1983, what were your impressions of Ramphal's management of the controversy of Grenada?

NL: I can't remember the details but it didn't require anything in particular; it was a fairly open thing time. For the first time, the small states were conscious that they were vulnerable to attack, in security terms. At that meeting the Commonwealth heads agreed that they should set up a group to study the problem of security for small states. That led to the first report on small states ever. Now, it seems that it might have happened in a different way, only on economics. The economics division had been thinking about the problem of small states but no major project had developed as yet.

So the heads had agreed in the communique that there should be a report and they were largely thinking political. Vishnu Persaud came in with a very strong stance

saying there should be economics; that this is the biggest part of the problem and the economics should be there. So, IAD had the overall management of the report, and EAD was wholly responsible for the economic aspect. In fact I had overall coordinating responsibility for the report, and I integrated EAD and other commissioned work. The issue of the security of small states was subsequently picked up by the UN, and became part of their routine work. They then went on to create the small states section but that was later. It remained part of the work of Economics (EAD), but not in any formal sense; the work remained *ad hoc*. The environmental aspect of small states' security gradually grew within this work. However, there's no question as to where the genesis of small states as a problem was looked at. The UN had made no attempt. There was no attention to small states before the Commonwealth Report on small states.

SO: How long did this report take to compile? What were your sources?

NL: We had to have it ready for the next Heads of Government meeting.

SO: So by 1985, in time for the Nassau CHOGM?

NL: Yes.

SO: What were your sources of research? To what extent were you soliciting opinion from bureaucracies of small states? What intellectual ideas did you tap into?

NL: Since small states had not been an issue before this, there was nothing to tap into. IAD and EAD each had to do their own original research. As I said, I wrote significant parts, particularly to do with their international organization. We asked - and again there's a link to Guyana – someone who had been doing had some experience of this who was a member of the Foreign Service of Guyana, when Ramphal was Foreign Minister – a chap called Lloyd Searwar – to do one of the chapters. Lloyd had been doing some work and had some interesting ideas. So, he did one of the chapters and of course he used some study he'd been working on for Sonny.

Outside of that, he was a personality in his own way as a leading poet. He was crippled. I always remember that we had to get Lloyd up from Guyana in a wheelchair and in those days of course the planes were not as organized as now. But, to fly all the way down to New Zealand, that was at another Commonwealth meeting. Everything in the report was written either by PAD or EAD, except for this one chapter by Searwar.

But, we did the report and that launched it at the Nassau meeting. As a result of the report, the Heads decided to put some money on the development of small states. Soon after that there was an attempted coup in Seychelles. Seychelles might only have asked the UN Secretariat before for help, but now that there was a consciousness of small state security, Seychelles came to the Secretariat and said – after it had survived this particular coup, (it was scotched in 48 hours, with the help of India) –that it wanted to do something about protecting isolated island states like itself and how easily it could be captured. It wanted to get a resolution in the UN dealing with the security of small states. They asked for help in looking at the problem and then drafting a resolution.

So, I was sent down to the Seychelles. I was there for about a month helping the Seychelles put together the proposal they would put to the UN. (I helped the Foreign Ministry with their drafting, which would then be sent to their Ambassador in New York. He would then return suggested amendments, which would be incorporated. It was a lengthy process.) It was all these things that led eventually to the UN having its own section looking at all the problems of the security of small states.

SO: Neville, how far do you think that this was a classic example of what the Commonwealth did and does best: in finding a technical expert at short notice to provide critical expertise?

NL: This is why I started off where I did. I put my little story on that now here. The Namibia elections: the representative of the UN Secretary General there was Martti Ahtisaari who was Under Secretary for Development. I went down to make all the arrangements for the election observer mission. This was in the first flush of election observer missions: it was a significant new thing that states were not accustomed to. We always went in at the highest level, to see the head of government. In this case, Ahtisaari would be like the head of government. So, I went in to see Ahtisaari. I remember sitting down, speaking with him and telling him what we would like and how we would like to operate and seeking that he'd ensure support for us, and security for us.

In just that chat before – he was a very nice man, an experienced diplomat and so on – he said, "I have great respect for the Commonwealth's work in technical assistance. On a very small amount of money you do excellent work. At the UN I always looked at it" and he didn't quite say he was jealous, but he was saying that by comparison with what big organizations have to do, the Commonwealth was certainly delivering and punching with that. There was no need for him to tell me that. I'm not at the Secretary General level. I'm there purely on the political issue to do with the elections. He just offers that comment. It really struck me as someone that experienced saying something that he believed and he was telling me. He was not going to get any benefit out of it in any way. It was just as we were talking, and he was commenting on how he saw the Commonwealth.

SO: The Commonwealth had already started to elaborate the process of observing missions and election monitoring before Namibia. This wasn't the first exercise.

NL: No, no. The election monitoring started with Malaysia.

SO: Yes. If I could just take you back to how election monitoring emerged in ?

NL: What is different about election monitoring was that the Commonwealth states' heads undertook to have objective election monitoring in cases where there was questioning of the system. Before, no individual state did that. In the decolonization process, on a difficult case like Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, election monitoring was necessary, but this was purely on an *ad hoc* basis. There had not been a routine practice before. This was not just the Commonwealth, it was anywhere in the world as a part of the democratic election system. That was the point: to be sure of a free and fair election, that you should use international supervision. This is quite a thing for a state to accept.

SO: It certainly was, for an independent sovereign state to accept external verification of its democratic processes.

NL: Yes, and that was the Malaysia Heads of Government meeting in 1989. A paper had been prepared by the Secretariat, distributed in the years before. Ramphal probably worked hard on it. This is the last thing he did before he left.

SO: It's interesting that in terms of the genesis of election monitoring to look back at the Commonwealth's previous activity in this area. I've looked through the Commonwealth Secretariat documents of the latter part of 1979, just at the time of the Lancaster House negotiations were discussing the transition arrangements. The proposal that there should be independent Commonwealth observation of the election process came from Ramphal. He argued firmly this should not simply be devolved to the United Nations because of the importance of Rhodesia/ Zimbabwe's transition to internationally recognised independence after multi-party elections for the Commonwealth itself.

NL: Yes.

SO: Then there was of course the attempt to replicate this in Uganda the following year which was much more problematic because of the four contesting parties and the continuing considerable violence.

NL: You see, all of those were at the beginning of states.

SO: Well, in Uganda it wasn't at the beginning of the state. Uganda had acquired its independence in 1962.

NL: But what was the election that made them want to have independent observers? How did it arise that they should have this?

SO: Undoubtedly because this was Uganda's return to democracy, after the ousting of Amin.

NL: I agree with all that. This is why I kept saying that election monitoring missions as a normal routine. You see, these were crisis situations: Zimbabwe/Rhodesia, and the phase after Idi Amin. But they had been one-offs. What happened in the meeting in Malaysia was that it was accepted that this would now be part of the routine practices of the Commonwealth.

SO: That the Commonwealth would lend its imprimatur to the process of elections?

NL: Yes. This was not for every state, but in cases where the people are asking for it. It's not for every state for every election.

SO: Neville, as a concept then, how was it proposed at the Kuala Lumpur CHOGM meeting? Was it hotly contested? How much of a fight did it provoke?

NL: This was the surprising thing. Stuart may know a bit more about it. But, it went through. Remember who was chairing that meeting - Mahathir. Because – and that's where Mahathir's story is important – they didn't think it could be a serious intrusion. They did not appreciate how thorough and intrusive process this would turn out to be. That's the fundamental problem. Mahathir in particular. Malaysia was about to have

an election, and in pushing through the resolution as Chair, he offered for Malaysia to be the first to have an observer group. Now, Mahathir famously at that stage used strong-arm tactics which, in a sense, were not necessary to secure success in the election.

This being the first, the DSG and I went out to discuss the arrangements with Malaysia. So, I tried to find out who were the principal parties, and other important media and pressure groups to let them know of our visit. I looked at the political scene, saw who were the leading actors, made contact with various people, saying we were coming and you should write and let us know if you would like us to see you about anything that could impact on the fairness of this election.

I discovered in the course of this that a group of prominent citizens had created a citizens' human rights group. They wrote me saying, "We hear that you are coming and we would like to see you". I looked into this group and found that it was the first such high level group on human rights that had happened in Malaysia. This is a collection of, in every sense, the great and the good in Malaysia. So, I got their details.

Now the preliminary is to go down to see their government about the arrangements. This occasion – well that became routine - was the very first one. So, at the very first one the representation in senior government would have to be at the highest level. So, the Deputy Secretary General (Sir Anthony Siaguru, of Papua New Guinea) and I went down to Kuala Lumpur for discussions with government on the modalities. We had an appointment to see Mahathir right off. When we enter Mahathir's aide comes out, and says, "Mahathir's ready to see you". But he says that I can't go. He says only the Deputy Secretary General gets in there. We said we are a team. He says, "No, it's only the Deputy Secretary General." Now, the whole thing was that somebody from International Affairs Division, which would be organizing the observer group, should be there with the Deputy Secretary General. (Because it was the first. We were developing our routines as we went along).

Anyhow Sir Anthony went in, had his chat and then they came out. The aide is now walking along with us. I have no idea what was said in there. But, the aide is walking along with us and the aide is saying, "From here you will go off to your hotel which has been organized and we have a timetable for your meetings. So, I stopped and said, "I'm sorry, I have the timetable of meetings." He said, "What?" I said, "This is an independent exercise and we have organized our meetings. In fact our first meeting is this afternoon." The guy stops in shock. He says, "What and who are you meeting?" I mentioned the name of the group. He says, "Stop here. I have to go back and see the President."

He goes back to Mahathir and Mahathir calls the Deputy Secretary General back in. Again, I'm not going in. They stay a while and then the Deputy Secretary General, Sir Anthony says, "Mahathir says that if we see that group this afternoon, that is the end of the election observing team. Malaysia will not agree to an election observer exercise". I said, "What?" He says, "Yes, if you see that group". I said, "We have to talk to the Secretary General. Let's go to the hotel". *[Laughter].*

So, we go to the hotel and call the Secretary General. We tell Emeka what is going on. Of course, he says, "This is a crisis and we can't have the whole enterprise which has just started grinding to a halt." This is the first and it is of course the first for Emeka who's just become Secretary General. So, Emeka says, "Alright, I'll speak to Mahathir." They had a long conversation, I gather, but at the end of that was a

compromise in which Mahathir said, “I’m calling it a compromise.” What happened is that Emeka said we must not see that group here. “Mahathir says that the group is very partial and that there is another group of citizens of similar prestige who, even though you are not seeing the one group, that you should see.” So, the Secretary-General was saying, “You should see the group mentioned by Mahathir before you leave, and get on with other appointments.” So, now, all this had to be done very quickly because the original group was coming at about 6.00pm that evening. We saw Mahathir at eleven. Anyhow, so I'm discussing it with the Deputy Secretary General and I said, “Look, you must not be involved in it because you're the formal head of this thing.” But, I said, “You should not be involved with these people coming. There's no way of turning them off.” The room had been booked.

So, that evening I went downstairs to the saloon and there are all these people. I'm telling you, they were at the height of Malaysian society and distinguished people: former chief justices, a leading law professor and UN rapporteur, a former governor general, a commissioner of police; they also reflected the four major ethnic groups. They are sitting there and I have to go and tell them that we can't meet with them. It was really the most embarrassing moment that I've had *[laughter]* on this job. So, I went in there and I said, “Look, something’s come up. We've had a problem with Mahathir and if we go ahead with this meeting today with you, he could stop the election observer process. So, I'm sorry, but we're caught. However, that is the situation at present.” These people - it's quite a lot, about 10-12 of them - were very experienced and understanding, and they said, “We know Mahathir”. I guess I was visibly upset and they said, “We know Mahathir and we can imagine his attitude.” They said, “In fact, he now knows we are here. As we came in here we could identify his agents in the foyer”, *[laughter]*. So, they said, “That's how it is”. Subsequently, I personally met the law professor whom I had known personally.

The evening papers that night and all of the news channels said “Commonwealth threatening rights of Malaysia. There may not be any election with Malaysia defending its rights”. Those were the headlines across all of the papers. *[Laughter].* It had been on the television as well. It had been instantly in the news, complete control. The headlines in the morning papers were about the creation of a group to defend the national rights of Malaysia.

After my abortive meeting with the first group, no doubt thereafter all our meetings were monitored by the Malaysian authorities because when the whole thing finished and we went back, we made a report and the election went ahead. But, it was quite clear what had happened. Malaysia had said I must not be a member of anything to do with this operation. So, the very first one which I very much wanted to be in charge of doing it… *[laughter]*.

SO: There was a large cross against your name!

NL: So, there is no question that they knew that I had gone then and met the group. The second day’s newspaper had about the creation of a group to defend the human rights of Malaysia, and it was a group that matched person for person in rank the people who had been in that first group. It was another governor general, it was another person who had the highest Malaysian rank which is like your OM of which there are only eight, a limited number; the only tun, the governor general is usually a tun. This group had a tun. *[Laughter].* It matched ethnically as well; that there was Malaysian, and there was Indian and there was Chinese, which this first group had had. You had business, you had a woman. That first group was that, but that was a natural gathering; they had made their own mix. But, this other group matched all the

way. You had to see that group before we left and the group met at the home of this chap who had been the last governor general. We stopped off to see that group on our way to the airport, as it was the only way to fit it into our tight schedule.

SO: So, you said your next experience of election monitoring was in Namibia, and subsequently Bangladesh?

NL: Namibia was a completely different type of observer group. Namibia was such a dramatic event; after all those years of South African rule, the whole world was looking at it and the UN was administering the country. But the whole world was watching. In the meantime various other groups were observing elections after we had come along; it's a boom, the national observer industry! It was quite clear that lots of election observers were going to be there. So, sitting back here we decided we were not going to go in and observe the election. It would be well observed. The UN was running it anyhow. What we would do would be to go in before the election, in the run-up to the election because in any case that is when elections are fixed. Whereas normally we go to observe the election, in Namibia uniquely we went in before so as not to be one of twelve groups observing the election itself. So, we went in well before and that's when I saw Ahtisaari and he was very cooperative. We were able to get around the country. He gave us UN helicopters and we covered as much of the country as possible, including the border regions. At one stage, we had to fly as low as the helicopter could go to avoid being caught up in an Angolan civil war contact.

We observed that election. A member of that election observer mission was Dudley Thompson, the former Foreign Minister of Jamaica and he had been Kenyatta's lawyer. That's how he made his reputation as a young lawyer. But he was your archetypal tough lawyer. He goes for the jugular. Now he was a member of this group. We would go around the country seeing various things. In going round the country we became aware that the Namibian government was up to different things that certainly would impact the election and probably for the benefit of the side that they were supporting and hope would win, and that was not SWAPO. We saw these things. So, after a particular trip in which this activity was mapped and clearly identified, we asked to see Ahtisaari. Ahtisaari came to the meeting of the observer group. We told him that in certain areas steps were being taken to undermine the fairness in the election. He was not ready to accept these specific examples because his own UN people had not reported to this effect. He thought he was running an efficient ship. He said, "Well, this simply couldn't be that this is going on and nobody would support anything like that." Then Dudley Thomson said, "Look, we're telling you this is what it is. Do something about it. This needs to be sorted out." He really went for him. Ahtisaari was visibly annoyed, but said he would look into it. Subsequently, he acknowledged that we were right and thanked us.

This is the point of the utility of this type of operation going in in advance, in comparison to a normal election observer group, was that it could contribute to the success and fairness of the election. So, that was done in Namibia and that was good. It turned out to be a good election. We made a contribution in a way in which we might not have made any significant contribution doing the routine subsequently; being one of twelve. Our numbers are so small. I think the election observer exercise really isn't much, the things that we do. The groups are not adequate enough to do anything decent. They really are not.

When we started we were barely adequate. It was at the beginning and you have larger groups. You have many more requests, plus at the same time the budget is

going down. The groups have got smaller and smaller. Now, it only worked even in the beginning unless you could have a large group as the two American groups are - even though they themselves would claim that they are able to cover enough that their statements can be backed up completely. What the Americans did was they put out seed money to establish effective local observer groups. Only the local observer groups would have the numbers. They do training – in all a much more thorough-going exercise. And because they are on the ground early, they can make wider contacts with civil society groups.

The presence of foreign observer groups led to the creation of local observer groups. Now, in all the elections that we went to, because of local observer groups, it's against the background of their reports that we can speak with confidence, because the local observer groups are at every polling area. They sit through the counting which we can't do, and so on. So, we depend on them. In the years when I did it, that was one of the things by which we could speak about with effectiveness because we know that the count has been safe, and that no boxes have been hidden or stuffed and that sort of thing. We're in no position to do that.

So, the local network was very important in the case of Bangladesh. Bangladesh was the happiest election. I've never forgotten Bangladesh. It was an election in which you actually feel a people feeling freedom after all the years of oppression. You could feel it in the air. There was joy in the air throughout that election. It was a gay election. You wouldn't associate Bangladesh with that. It was quite extraordinary. Of course it's extraordinary with the two ladies, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia! The booths all over the place, the election booths scattered throughout the city rather than big offices' election booths. All the booths had piped music running, flags and bunting and so on.

So, the Bangladeshi people were really interested in this election. It was run competently. It was one of the most competent elections I've seen run by the acting president who had been the Chief Justice and became the acting President after Ershad was thrown out. The Chief Justice is about that high, and is the toughest little man I've ever met! He ran that election like that; he really did. It was really beautifully done. On election day, at five o'clock in the morning, I went out with a couple of observers. There was this long queue that had clearly been lining up since five o'clock in the morning; mostly women, because they want to vote early to go back to their farms, because the best time to farm is in the morning before it's hot. So, they had walked miles and then stood patiently to vote. It was striking.

At these election booths, I listened to the music piping and these election speeches and I thought it was really odd given that who was running the election, because I'm not hearing the candidates. So, I asked, "Who's that speaking? What is being broadcast?" Depending which party it was, it was either the father of the candidate on the one hand, or the husband of the candidate; i.e. two dead men. (Of the two candidates, one was the daughter of the first president, and the other the wife of President Ziaur Rahman, who had been assassinated.) That's who was speaking. Driving through, there was this mock election going on all of the time. *[Laughter].*

SO: From beyond the grave?

NL: Yes! And yet when you went in election meetings, they were the largest elections. Because of their enthusiasm, as I said the release from oppression, the meetings could only be held on huge grounds on the outskirts of the city. It is like a pop concert when you see the stage, and you look out and there are people as far as

the eye can see. That was the Bangladesh election, in this conservative Islamic country with two women candidates. It was quite astonishing stuff.

SO: Neville, on your return to London then did you have debriefing sessions on not just that particular election, but how the process itself might be modified, or refined?

NL: Yes, yes, yes. This is fair comparing some of the discussion that day because very early in the day looking at the Bangladesh elections, I'd said that we needed to be able to go in from as close to a year before the elections; but it's a question of money, admittedly. But the election is fixed in that year. All the tricks are done in that time.

SO: On voter registration? Siting the polling booths?

NL: Unless we are able to check them beforehand. When you go and look at the election, you're looking already at the part fait accompli. But we were never able to take it all seriously. When the UK Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS) was created about 20 years ago, they took that on. In fact, this British chap who used to be at PAD about the one of two years ago, Chris Child was a political adviser. Unfortunately just as I left the Secretariat, they brought in the group to look at its workings. Thatcher was trying to cut down the Secretariat and they brought in the management group to reshape the whole Secretariat in about 1989. That's when there was a huge cutback. Thatcher had always wanted to do it but she didn't try it around Ramphal; but as soon as Ramphal was gone, she was in there. They came up with recommendations and their recommendations were interesting in terms of what was then IAD, and later became PAD, was that they cut back the whole Secretariat, except IAD. They said IAD not only needed more staff, but it went on to say that people at my rank which is what is now, they renamed political adviser and the salary be the equivalent of a director with the work that we were doing, without the perks and allowances that a director gets as well. But the basic salary should be the same as a director.

One of the things that happened in the wake of the election observer meeting was that the Swedes developed an institute to look at elections and democratic government. I'm trying to remember the name of the institute. The Swedish International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). It was formed in 1995 in Stockholm, with a lot of money from the Swedish government and led by a former Swedish head of their foreign service. They had conferences on election observing, the first organization to look at this sort of thing. At Sonny's recommendation, I attended one of those conferences, and became an adviser for a year or two. At the conference I raised the issue of the need for the observer process to start a year before the actual poll date. I think they took it on. The reason I'm remembering that is that Chris Child was there from the Secretariat at the conference; and I believe that he pursued the idea when he returned to London.

SO: Just to summarize: the Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1989 agreed there should be election observations. This was one of the areas where 'the Secretariat could make a distinctive contribution' – and I'm reading from the current Commonwealth Secretariat website – 'and established a high level group to agree a set of guidelines which were finalized two years later in 1991'. Did you have input into framing those guidelines on election observer missions?

NL: Yes. I had input since I was a member of PAD. We worked very closely with the Secretary General's office, the head of Legal Division, Jeremy Pope, and Carl Dundas (who had experience of running elections in Jamaica.) At that stage we were working in the dark because we had no experience of running elections ourselves. But we were working towards some sort of ideal. The question that you should be there beforehand was something that I saw from experience.

In practice the Secretariat would send in an advance group a couple of months before. I have a good story on how that useful in the case of the Kenya election. This was the election with Moi (in 1992), the one he should have lost. In fact he won but it's the peculiarity of the counting process (that determined the outcome), not anything illegal.

It was just as with Bangladesh, where one saw a people excited and glad to be able to vote freely. In Bangladesh there was a successful and peaceful people's revolution, because the soldiers refused to defend Ershad. Protestors walked down the main drag in their numbers. He sent out the troops in front of the palace. Demonstrators walked right up and the troops didn't shoot. Their officer didn't tell them to shoot to the people. That's how Ershad fell. It's one of those seminal events which started to spread, in which the girl puts a flower inside the rifle and it goes on from there. The whole thing of that election in Bangladesh, of course, was that you had the two very inexperienced women and behind them the politicians who'd always been there. Bangladesh has suffered from that from then to now.

In the case of Kenya: for the first time things had got so bad that significant new figures came out to oppose arap Moi. The most significant of these was Dr Ken Matiba. He had been in politics and then left and came up here to the UK, and lived here for decades. Then, with this election, Matiba decided he was going back home. That led to a ground swell. He created a party which from scratch it was quite clear was going to do well. So, you would have the scenario of Moi's party, KANU, and the Kikuyu party with Kibaki (the Democratic Party [DP]), the Luo group with Oginga Odinga (the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy [FORD]), and this other brave new force. Ken Matiba was doing so well that the other two, Raila and Kibaki agreed to go in a coalition with him because he obviously had the ground swell of popular support. Now with the three of them together, it was quite clear from everything that was going on that they were going to sweep that election. But Kibaki, the Kikuyu leader, felt that the Presidency was his to inherit, couldn't stand it. Just before the election, he broke away. It's the only reason that Moi won as it divided the votes. I mean, I could have shot Kibaki myself! It was so disgraceful! The ground swell was great; the people were ready to believe in the election outcome because it was going to be observed. Not only that: the important other thing that this was going to be a fair election. Then this happened! So that's what we went in to.

Now, a group of us went to Kenya a month in advance: Carl Dundas as head, Patsy as the information person, and myself. I went around the country. As I went around the country I saw what Moi was up to. In his constituency, Eldoret, I could see the widespread damage through attacks on parties/people who opposed KANU that had been done: houses burnt, cattle killed and people terrorized. The other aspect which was country-wide which quite clear that the other side was not getting anything that could be called 'fair access' to the media and public resources. The government was using state resources to promote party political purposes. Moi was using government transport up and down the country, but those opposition guys couldn't. Another example was on the National Day, when the KANU party paraded past the dignitaries

in the national stadium, in front of foreign ambassadors. (The Canadian Ambassador and I walked out; the British and American Ambassadors didn't move!).

So, when I came back from this tour I said to the others, "This is what I've seen and this is not going to be a fair election. I think at least we should try and see what can be done about the playing field being a little more equal." Patsy was on board from the beginning, but while Carl was on board, he was a little bit reluctant to involve Emeka immediately. Anyhow, they agreed to call Emeka. We called Emeka who was in Ghana, and told him what the situation was; that there was clearly not a fair playing field and that it wouldn't be good at all. To his credit, Emeka took the point right away. He spoke with Moi. He had a long conversation, and got Moi to agree to give more radio and newspaper time to the opposition.

We went into the election and the election results were quite clear. There might have been odd little things here and there that might have not been fair. We don't know; as I said, we don't have the numbers to cover everything. But the point is despite whatever tricks Moi played, the results were clear. At the presidential election, he won on a minority vote because everything was divided amongst his opponents. He didn't even have 40%. He became president with 36 bloody percent! The majority of the country had voted against him, (but) because of the silly break-up, because of Kibaki, Moi was the winner. It was exactly the same thing at the parliamentary level, at seat after seat. Moi's party got the seat because of the division amongst the opposition. But if you added all this up, in most of the seats they also won with less than 40%.

SO: But Neville, given your responsibility as part of a Commonwealth election observer mission, you couldn't make that argument. Your role was to observe and report.

NL: There was no argument to make. There was no argument on the results. Moi won on the electoral system that was there. There was nothing we could do about it.

SO: Exactly. He won on the plurality of the vote.

NL: Yes. Nothing we could do about it. It was absolutely shocking. But what then happened was that Kibaki, when the results came out, blew his top. He said it was an unfair election, also things went on and "The Commonwealth has given it a whitewash". He made that charge. Again, Emeka had to come down to Nairobi because this was all within the same 24 hours. The report was due to come out and Kibaki was really grandstanding and really being very difficult. So Emeka flew in and met Kibaki. I was at that meeting, with Kibaki and his small team. Kibaki really tore into Emeka.

SO: How did Chief Emeka handle that?

NL: Well, he just said, "Look, this is a group from the Commonwealth. These are very senior, respected people and their report is of what they saw." But, he couldn't tell Kibaki, "This is your fault." I was dying to tell Kibaki that, although I really wanted to kick him to the door. I mean, it was shocking because Kenya had reached that stage where there was a unity across those three parties. There was an overwhelming vote of the sort you still have not seen, against Moi.

SO: Exactly. But, the parties bought into the election because each believed they could win; and then that turned into, going through the election process, meaning they must win.

NL: Kibaki up here (tapping head) thought he could win.

SO: Indeed. Kibaki and his team bought into the election believing that they could win, therefore they should win. But because they didn't, they disputed the veracity of the vote.

NL: There was not anything that they could do. It had nothing to do with what was quite clear; you only to look at the numbers. It wasn't that Moi got more votes because of fixing anything. Votes were distributed across the three, vastly distributed. The three of them had 60 bloody percent of the vote, at the parliamentary level as well as the presidential level.

SO: Neville, in your view, to what extent did Kibaki's accusation discredit the value of Commonwealth observer missions?

NL: That was not out in public. It didn't make much impact. Richard Dowden, the leading Africa journalist of the day, wrote a very strong article criticizing the Commonwealth report. The reason for that roasting article again, was probably the last phrase in the report. (Dowden had seen incidents of people being coerced.) The group as a whole saw a decent election; they thought it had gone well as an election but not looking at the political result. They wrote saying the people of Kenya had spoken clearly. A particular issue was the last sentence: it was over the top.

Now, we were responsible of the drafting of whatever comes out. This was added in the final discussion. I went to Max Gaylard and I said, "That is bad; it should not be in there". Max was new, he had just come, this was his first election monitoring mission. Max was still operating very much as an Australian foreign service officer. He was acting strictly as an official, and therefore we should have no opinions. Any opinions were only those of the observer group. He hadn't yet adjusted. I said, "Yeah, but, you know, that really should not be in there. It is over the top". We were under extreme time pressure; our practice from the Ramphal days at the Secretariat was to do things immediately and at speed. There were four election groups there in Kenya; we were the smallest team, but we were the first to put out a report. We were therefore on that deadline. Some observer team members were packing, ready to go as soon as they'd signed the report. I would have slipped a note to the Chair if I could have, as I knew the Chair well personally. I would have had to walk around the other side of the table and slip it in. The trouble was Max was sitting next to the Chair. So I couldn't, because Max was there.

That's actually the thought that went through my head at the time to slip something to him to say, "You know, take a second look at this." When they approved the report, they got up and while they were milling around, I said to the Chair, Telford Georges, "You could all change the last sentence. We're all still here". I said if he spoke to the Canadian, he could agree to withdraw it and it'd be alright. The others wouldn't need a vote if he himself wanted to withdraw it. So, I went to that extent. While Telford Georges saw the problem, he didn't feel that he could raise it. The sentence in question was a well-known phrase. I think it was a phrase from JFK. It was just some nice phrase this Canadian decided to put in at this stage of this (report). It was a euphoric statement.

SO: No wonder you had steam coming out of your ears, because it was overblown. *[Laughter].*

Neville, please could I ask you about the Commonwealth Secretariat and conflict mediation/resolution?

NL: I remember one very important incident. When President Samora Machel was killed in the plane crash in October 1986, FRELIMO was in danger of being defeated by RENAMO, because of lack of weapons and a need for military advice. Ramphal was going to the opening of the UNO General Assembly, and I was there as observer from the Commonwealth Secretariat. A gathering of African Foreign Ministers were acutely concerned at the assassination of a FLS leader. His successor, Chissano was an unknown quantity, and it looked as if things in Mozambique might crumble. It was then decided to try to get arms and support to FRELIMO. The African Foreign Ministers asked Ramphal if he would go to Nigeria. The Nigerian Foreign Minister called Lagos, to see if Babangida was ready to discuss the issue. He agreed. Nigerian Airways was then a decent airline! Within 24 hours, we flew from New York, to Lagos. From the airport, we went straight to see Babangida, and he agreed financial support – and the key aspect – to giving military advice; and could Obasanjo come down and give it? Now Obasanjo was his possible rival, and anything that could inflate his standing was sensitive.

We went straight off to the Government guest-house. On the way there, Ramphal instructed me, “Why don’t you go and see Obasanjo?” So I do this, going to see Obasanjo on his chicken farm! (It was a massive commercial complex.) I discussed this with him, and explained the urgency. He agreed right away. How to get there? A Nigeria Air Force plane was to fly him to Maputo. So within 12 hours Obasanjo was ready to go. (Emeka and I went to Maputo, via London.) There was a discussion as to Mozambique’s needs, and a needs list was created. We then flew to the other FLS with this needs list, to see what they could supply: Lusaka, Nairobi, Dar, and Harare, and I independently went over to Luanda, to brief them what was going on. I remember that when we were leaving Nairobi, Thabo was at the airport coming up to London; and I was able to fill him in what was going on. I was impressed how able and efficient, and quick to grasp the essentials Robert Mugabe was. You were aware you were speaking to an intensely bright person. (This was a contrast to the style of the hospitable KK, with his pet lion!). Mugabe readily offered arms and assistance, as did KK. At the time, this was a one-off for the Commonwealth on military advice, and was the result of a unique concatenation of events. Ramphal was there in New York, and the Foreign Ministers asked him to go down to Lagos to ask Babangida. Ramphal said yes, because he was accustomed to dealing with Front Line leaders.

There was one other very odd incident in which there was an armed revolution and we tried to contribute towards solving it, in Papua New Guinea. This was a separatist movement, on the island with the largest open cast copper mine in the world. The Australians had moved out lock stock and barrel. The staff just decamped and the island was under the control of the rebels, who closed the airport. Hugh Craft dropped this on my desk.

The Commonwealth tried to get the parties to talk. Because of stuff I had done before coming to the Secretariat, I was very conscious that the one organization which is always there, it always survives and which has international links is the church. I called the British Council of Churches to find out whether any of the churches on neighbouring islands were in touch with the rebel group. The rebels were in increasing need of medical supplies and food, I asked if the BCC could find the name

and phone number of the churchman who facilitated this. I phoned this chap, and said “I understand you are in touch with the rebels, that they feel safe and can get food/medical supplies through you. Could you please tell them when you are next in touch, that the Commonwealth would like to speak to them?”

The priest got a phone number of the contact with the PNG rebels in Port Moresby. I got in touch with him, to pass on a message that we would like to talk to them. He eventually came back to me and said yes, they would like to talk. So I went out to PNG (The Secretariat let the PNG government know first – they were a bit reluctant.) I remember going and seeing the Prime Minister, and said that this was all preliminary. Everything was kept separate from the central government, not even using their planes. I let the rebels know that I would be there with their representative in the northern coast resort. They agreed to a private flight coming to land on the airstrip of the copper mines.

I flew in on a single engine plane, and sat down to discussions with the rebels to get them to negotiate. Their leader was a young officer who was disgusted with the way the country was being run, and how little the copper mine receipts were being spent on local people. So they had taken over, and blown up various things (such as the runway.) But they were suffering because of their isolation, and food supplies were running short, as were medical supplies. So we argued. At a certain stage, I stopped being a Secretariat officer. I became a person from the Third World, and started to talk differently. I said, “This is what happened to liberation movements! Even though they had been going for a year, no one had recognized them. And nor would anyone. They had no profile, it was not going to work.” It was a shouting match!

We had to leave while it was still light. The PNG airport was not set up for night landing, yet they didn’t want to stop arguing. So it was at the very last minute that we jumped into the jeep, and drove fast to the airstrip, the pilot there with the engine running, ready to leave. We flew into a violent rain squall. We made it – just. At Port Moresby there were people running up and down with lights to guide us in. The Australian owner of the plane jumped in and shouted at the pilot, “What the hell do you think you were doing with my plane?”

The thing was I came back with the rebel agreement to a meeting. When I had got to Port Moresby I had spoken to the British Ambassador. But it hadn’t occurred to me I should also speak to the Australian Ambassador on the way back. But when I reached Port Moresby, the Australian Ambassador was leaving, so I didn’t manage this. The Secretariat got into high gear. The rebels refused to meet on the mainland, and the central PNG government refused to meet on Bougainville. It was finally agreed that it should be neutral ground. The Australians who felt they were quasi-owners of this island, offered a naval ship as the venue for talks, off-shore the Solomon Islands. At the last minute, the Australians said that the ship was not available – a clear indication that they were annoyed that the Commonwealth had done this, NOT them.

The Secretariat needed to find a regional chair for the negotiations. They identified a former New Zealand Governor General of Maori extraction, who had also been a minister of the church and had become Archbishop. He had also served as New Zealand Representative to the UN General Assembly. It was a dream ticket! The man is chosen. The date is set. He flew to PNG to get onboard the ship. I fly in from London. Then the Australians said the ship was not available. NOTHING happened! Nothing was resolved until nearly 10 years later. Negotiations were only achieved bilaterally, and through Australian channels. So it wasn’t just Mrs Thatcher opposing

Commonwealth activity, on economic issues. States want to restrict international organisations, not to expand them.

In the meantime, between this point and the final resolution of the crisis, to try to stop the fighting which was causing considerable loss of life, we offered to monitor the ceasefire. The PNG government was ready to accept this. The rebels were still suspicious as they wanted an international group. They saw the Commonwealth as favouring the PNG central authority. So we added a couple of foreigners who were non-Commonwealth, who were knowledgeable in this field. I went down to take this group over to PNG to monitor the removal of arms and their storage. Before we went, we went to visit the PNG Prime Minister to brief him. We then flew to Bougainville. The airport was a hive of activity, because it was filled with PNG soldiers getting on planes. The airport people said, "the Army is leaving." We checked back with the Prime Minister's office, to find he had withdrawing the army – but he hadn't had the courtesy to tell us. There was no question of monitoring government arms! We went through the formalities of monitoring the rebel arms. There was no joint guard of the storage. We still had to go through the motions. We were now very worried because the protection that the group felt would have been with both groups was no longer there. We were isolated, with just the rebels. The Commonwealth people weren't too worried, but the foreigners – including the diplomat - were very concerned about their security. I phoned the Secretary General to brief him, asking him to speak to the PNG leader to organize a flight out at a guaranteed time. This was in the full knowledge that once we had left, the arms would be distributed again to the rebels. It is symptomatic of the level and style of government in PNG, to say absolutely nothing to this major international group.

This was an isolated attempt at conflict mediation. We were not equipped to deal with armed, trained liberation groups. The Bougainville case was strictly *ad hoc*.

SO: Neville, what was your view of Sonny Ramphal and Chief Emeka's style of diplomacy?

NL: Ramphal is a remarkably charismatic figure. He had his ear to the ground in the Secretariat, and had a remarkable ability to earn people's loyalty and commitment. He has an immediate personal warmth. He always had time for gossip! And gossip can be very useful as sometimes it can bring in information that a person at the head of an organization might not normally get.

Emeka has been a diplomat all his life. There are those of us who have our reservations of Emeka, and Emeka's my friend. Emeka has always been a professional diplomat. He is very experienced and skilled. He is able to give an impression of gravitas that very few others can. The difference between a diplomat running things and a person of a political background running things is that the political person is a little freer.

My reservation is that fundamentally for major international organizations like the Secretariat, I didn't think that someone who had spent their professional life in the organization, moving from a staff position to the senior position over a long time, was good for the organization. I had the same reservation later when the UN was not able to find a suitable political candidate was ready to appoint a staff person, Kofi Annan, to the post of Secretary General. Fortunately, in both cases, they functioned very well. You want to bring in someone new and fresh at the top, with different exposure.

So, Arnold Smith couldn't be corralled even though they tried things with him, and Ramphal did his own thing. In fact, when Ramphal ended, Thatcher invited him to dinner and this was acknowledging an adversary at the end of the day. She was grand that way.

SO: Relations between Marlborough House and Downing Street had become really very tense by the end of Ramphal's time.

NL: Yes. When he was given the knighthood, it was accompanied by a particular invitation. She invited him to lunch, and they had a very pleasant ending. Ramphal, as I said, was in all these commissions. Emeka was a very good Secretary General. It's just that there were various levels in which you make a contribution. It's also more than that. It's also opportunity. Some people can make opportunity out of situations. But some people also have an advantage of particular opportunities.

In addition to all the characteristics of Ramphal, the timing was also nice. He had Heads of Government to deal with whom you can play, who were ready to play; they're not just going to a meeting. You had creative people. It wasn't just the Africans. You had Trudeau. You could go through the list. As well, very fundamentally, in the offices of the major old Commonwealth countries, you had strong support for the Commonwealth which has faded continuously from then until now. You still had, whether you wanted to call it an 'old guard', the senior civil servants for whom the Commonwealth was clearly on their radar, in the case of Australia and more particularly Canada which is part of the reason that at that time Canada was the largest donor to the CFTC. There were senior civil servants there who had a genuine supportive interest and you must have those. Of course, part of what subsequently affected Canada is that just from about that time the French community came along.

SO: La Francophonie?

NL: Yes. So, they had to divide themselves. From the time of them dividing themselves, it seems to me Canada's interest in the Commonwealth has been on a steady downward slope. When Ramphal was there, that effect had not become quite as obvious. They were names that you would know in Canada, of top civil servants and so on, with a Commonwealth interest and who would encourage. But this is a two-way encouragement, if you have a Prime Minister who's interested. So you had Trudeau, and a couple of successors, Joe Clark and Brian Mulroney. During all of the South Africa thing, Mulroney was a strength. Mulroney was seriously supportive on the issue. So, you had people to work with, who were on the same wavelength. I remember when we did the South Africa thing the meeting was in the Bahamas. This was the famous meeting at Nassau in 1985, to which Thatcher went out with a strong pro-South Africa position. When she came back to the UK from the meeting, she said she'd only given in "a tiny little bit". However, that Nassau meeting set up the EPG. This was a group of six, and the review meeting of their report– the mini heads summit in London in June 1986 - was held in Marlborough House. The fantastic thing about that particular EPG was that on the ground the people who went in there were transformed. That is what happened to Anthony Barber. He had been carefully chosen as he knew Africa, as a director biggest bloody bank across all Africa – Standard Chartered – as well as a former Chancellor, and so fellow Cabinet member of Thatcher. At the end when the time came, many were wondering if Barber would sign this report. Barber did sign the report. That is one of the transformational moments.

SO: Where were you in the Secretariat's support for the EPG?

NL: IAD was the key Secretariat forum for the EPG. It was divided into two teams: one dealt with South Africa, and other with Front Line States. I was the team that went with the Front Line States. So I didn't get to South Africa. The team that went to the Front Line States had less interaction with the actual EPG group, but it was negotiations with the ANC. You had to keep them abreast of what the EPG was doing. They were very suspicious of the whole thing. They had to be convinced, that this was serious and had any possibility of working; Thabo particularly. It meant giving up revolutionary resistance as the means of change, and that another way could work, and be beneficial to the ANC. The second team was also dealing with Tanzania and Zambia. I was there in Dar when one of the bombs exploded, killing one of the ANC people. (Dar was the target for the South Africans – they assassinated more than one liberation person; there was the head of SWAPO, who was assassinated in Tanzania.) As part of IAD, I contributed to the final report. Moni Malhoutra was in overall control of the writing up.

SO: So, do you think that report contributed to financial disinvestment in South Africa?

NL: That had already started with the talks of the investors, which had begun quite independently. The big financial disinvestment was American.

SO: I was wondering whether pressure on Barclays, and pressure on Standard Chartered Bank, was connected in any way to the EPG report?

NL: I don't know if Barber had any role individually in that. But, the point is when the EPG report came back there was Thatcher stuck with this report. There in the meeting in June 1986, the six heads are around the table and they're discussing it at Marlborough House. I remember a particular moment when, even though her man signed it, Thatcher was trying to resist accepting some aspects of the report. I remember Mulroney sitting there and saying, "Do you know, Margaret, when I was young, my Prime Minister was the person who helped push that South Africa could not stay in the Commonwealth if it was going to continue with apartheid."

SO: Diefenbaker?

NL: Yes. He said, "That was my Prime Minister." Then Mulroney said, "As a young student, I felt proud. I will not do anything here today that no student would not want to feel proud of me." The meeting had reached that level.

SO: But, you know, Neville, the irony is that the South Africans valued Mrs. Thatcher's position as a friend of South Africa, although the National Party government knew she disapproved of apartheid. The EPG would not have got through the door into South Africa had it not been for her advocacy with President Botha.

NL: Yes. Yes. But it's the actions at the end, you know, it is the willingness to take a strong position at the end and the pressure which is the whole thing. The Commonwealth countries amongst themselves claim credit for ending apartheid, and certainly the private sector initiative claims credit for it. There were also clandestine private sector meetings both with the South African government and the ANC, and which eventually brought them together. There were private meetings with Mandela which had not become public. While still a prisoner, Mandela was ferried to places for

talks. Then there was American pressure. Then came the disinvestment. It was what was happening with the South African economy because the Americans were pulling the rug out from under and the South Africans were feeling the pinch. Disinvestment was not the formal position of the American government. Major churches withdrew their investment with significant demands when it was all added up. Major universities including the University of California and Harvard withdrew their investment.

SO: Neville, just to take the story slightly beyond this point: after Mrs Thatcher, what was your observation of John Major's style at the Harare CHOGM? Did you attend that?

NL: Yes. Now, Major to the world, because he followed Thatcher, and the way the press dealt with him from the beginning, was underrated generally in this country, across a range of things. But, in his Commonwealth work, at least in his South Africa Commonwealth work, when he was Foreign Minister, he was strong, particularly in committee work. Like Thatcher, he always knew his brief. Thatcher was outstanding, because she knew her brief. Major, while not as impressive, was still well-briefed. One of the things that made the thing work because there was a Foreign Ministers Committee on South Africa, was that Major was strong throughout despite what Thatcher was saying. Major was very useful in the Foreign Ministers meeting. He held a very good position. I don't know about what actually happened at Harare. I don't know that part of it, as I had to leave early to go to Zambia for their elections.

SO: One of his particular agendas after Harare was to emphasize consensus, to make sure there was again a closing of ranks with Commonwealth and British policy towards South Africa. Of course, with the release of Mandela and the end of the Cold War, the international environment was that much easier.

NL: I don't know about it because I had to leave that meeting early because that meeting coincided with elections in Zambia. So, I left just before the end of the meeting. I was very much involved. I had left just about practically the last day or the day before the last day to go to Zambia.

SO: What did you think of Emeka's style in persuading Kaunda that he must accept elections and he must step down?

NL: I don't know too much of what he did, but he did it. As I said, we claim these things but the Americans were working hard.

SO: I wanted to ask you about that. How far did the Carter Foundation pick up on Commonwealth ideas, or Commonwealth models in its own election monitoring? Was there any cross-fertilization of ideas?

NL: Not really. They wanted it in the American way; they threw a lot of resources at it, sent out a lot of people, they used a lot of young graduates to go out early and collect information and so on. They had the advantage of Carter's personal interest. So, they were very well placed when they went in. What we didn't like about them, and which is in more than one election I think, that they involved themselves in the domestic political process, whereas we deliberately kept our distance. When I saw it in the case of Zambia was that because they had been playing this role, because they had been close to the actors and because of the way Carter is, I suppose. It is a bit of his personality. They involve themselves in the politics. They're in the front with

statements which we are careful about. The Carter Foundation, of course, is not a governmental group, so he doesn't have to be careful. So, Carter made statements which we certainly didn't like. They were a bit ridiculous, particularly since you don't know anything about the new man, you know. He was "heralding a new dawn", and all sorts of things.

SO: Chiluba was not that. *[Laughter].*

NL: It was really quite irritating, quite irritating.

SO: The reason I asked whether the Carter Foundation had picked up on any of the Commonwealth modalities of election monitoring was Sir Peter Marshall's point about the value of the Commonwealth as a global sub-system acting as a pilot fish; that it's tried out ideas and innovations that others copied.

NL: I think that on the small states and election observer groups, yes. International institutions did pick up these ideas. There are certain things that are quite clear, as against things that we claim which tend to be more on a political level; how much do you claim as to what your contribution is in terms of South African transition? What did the other players do? One of the first thing that Mandela wanted to do after his release was to go to Nigeria, to thank the Nigerians for their financial support for the ANC. It had been substantial. In fact we timed one of the last meetings of the Foreign Ministers Committee on South Africa to be in Lagos, to coincide with Mandela's visit.

There's no question about election observers. That we established it, that it was followed by the UN which consulted to a certain extent formally, and the EU and all other regional organizations followed suit in setting up election observer groups. There's no question about the line there. It undoubtedly spurred the Swedish establishment of IDEA, and they consulted Ramphal on how to set it up. Which is how I came to attend one of the initial planning meetings.

And small states, there's also no question. The difficulty of small states having representation at various international institutions is it's costly for them. It is also the idea of developing a Small States Office. That again is something that IAD had to implement. I went up to New York, we found a place and got the architect, divided it up; I signed a contract. I had no idea that Park Avenue had offices for lawyers! It's not the image you have of the street. *[Laughter].* When the time came to sign this contract, I had to go to this law office, a grand building on Park Avenue, go up several levels, to sign this contract because they were the people that had the building. But the building for the Small States Office was so perfect. It's just one block down from the UN, on First Avenue. (We're doing the same thing in Geneva but on a much smaller scale.) In New York, we provided accommodation at a much lower rent, and also staff with appropriate research skills, who can contribute their needs on key issues, which small states' limited embassy staff cannot cover.

It still has to be addressed as to how to make effective an organization, the majority of which is small states. We focus on all sorts of things but to me that is still the fundamental weakness of the Commonwealth, and its potential strength. If you recognize that, that is where the Commonwealth is at how much more should our programme be orientated to those states.

The debt issue is the other strong technical achievement; hard things that we did. The UN and everybody else followed on our debt line. This, as with other important aspects, was in part fall out from the individual expert group reports of Ramphal's time. (There were 13 in all, between 1975-1990.)

SO: Neville, how much do you feel the ending of the Cold War has affected the importance of the Commonwealth?

NL: The context of the Cold War was important for the Commonwealth. That international institutions were particularly hide bound by this, which enhanced the importance of the NAM and the Commonwealth as international institutions which were not in this straight-jacket. The Cold War opened up the space for the third powers, and their leaders who were ready to play on the international scene (e.g. Scandinavia, Canada). Now it is individual states, bilateral and regional relations. Now you don't hear about South/South. States are really acting bilaterally, regionally and in the other networks, even though South/South links are developing. There is no one dominant supranational network. In the Caribbean, when Americans created the Community of Democracies, people joined with the speed of a Ferrari – including many Commonwealth states! It is an international community along the lines of the Commonwealth or La Francophonie: the link is democracy, and the initial attraction must have been American financial support. I suspect that the Americans initially wanted to bolster East European democracy. Interestingly, it built in civil society as a natural part of the organization at the start. At the time, civil society as an institutional phenomenon was not widely accepted.

The Cold War and the Secretary General gave the Commonwealth a particular significance and importance. Ramphal was an extraordinary individual at a unique time. The right people could exploit the opportunities, and the unique dynamics of international relations at this time. Ramphal could use that atmosphere and environment which his successors have not been able to. It was a very flexible era, exactly because of the two extremes in the Cold War, and the floating group which was being wooed in the middle. And in the floating group, there were the states whose leaders wanted to make a difference; hence the Scandinavians spent large sums in foreign aid, development on different lines of the programmes of the established powers. Their approach to aid was quite different: Ramphal was able to operate in this arena.

SO: What about the Commonwealth going forward?

NL: Commonwealth member states are stuck so much in a traditional way of thinking. A fundamental weakness is the member states – it is not the Secretariat, nor the Secretary General. It is the reality of the commitment of member states, and their real values and priorities. At the height of the Cold War, there was a focus on unity and a few key issues (disarmament, development, and especially nuclear weapons) across a band of states in that international context. At that time it was not HIV/AIDS, health or drugs, or international terrorism. That came later. In time, as those states grew in independence, their alignments and focus have naturally become regional. Priority international organizations for African states are obviously African and regional (AU). It is natural. You would not find across the Commonwealth any particularly attention to the Commonwealth in their foreign ministries.

A useful study would be to look at Commonwealth foreign ministries now and what staff is assigned to deal with Commonwealth issues. It is unlikely that in the majority of states there is any single individual. Canada or Australia could afford it, but not

smaller states. Even in the UK, it has been a regular practice for academics here to monitor and critique the decline of FCO staffing re: the Commonwealth, and the quality of the staff. If that can happen in the UK, imagine the rest. By contrast, in the small states, they must have someone assigned to their regional organizations and international funding organizations. The Commonwealth has never been a major source of funding. Their interests do not make them want to spend time on the Commonwealth. It is as basic as that.

An example of this was Sri Lanka: The initial choice of Sri Lanka as venue for a CHOGM meeting, and the sustaining of that choice through the Perth meeting is a stark reflection of the lack of interest of Commonwealth heads in the values issue. And once a state is chosen as a CHOGM venue, it is not important enough to be reconsidered. It is also lack of sufficient and reliable information on such matters before a choice has to be made. The Secretariat does not send out sensitive information on a member state beforehand. One basis for this is the Commonwealth's argument is that it works in a collegiate manner. It emphatically does not work as a club! That was the Commonwealth of 40 years ago – to use the label 'club' is a gross misrepresentation of what it is and what it does. It is a constant romanticism of the organization, which does it no service whatsoever. This is the basis of Sharma's 'quiet diplomacy' *vis-a-vis* Sri Lanka – that the Commonwealth does not 'confront'. But if you are going to do this, the Secretary General needs well-informed and experienced staff at the Secretariat. The Secretariat of today is significantly smaller than in Ramphal's day. It is not just a question of size: you also had really able people at the Secretariat, such as Moses Anafu and Anita Howick, who later became a research assistant at the UNO, on small states. By the late 90s, governments were not thinking of whom to place people for strategic reasons in the Secretariat, except International Division and CFTC. The Secretariat didn't have that prestige.

The same issue of limited access to information is true of the appointment of the Secretary General: the mechanism is there for getting adequate information out to member states. There may be no problem getting this at heads level, but the same is not true for civil society. It would require a specific mechanism to do that.

The Commonwealth will survive, partly because these things don't wither away; because the practical assistance which is offered through technical assistance on the development side is real, although it is not much. Heads' willingness and interest to attend CHOGM meetings was already declining before Sri Lanka. It still is an organization that has a lot to contribute. Its capacity does not depend on its Secretary General, although its image does. Its general capacity depends on getting committed and well-qualified staff through its organization. The academic and media world focus on political affairs and human rights, yet where the Commonwealth does deliver is on technical assistance and development. However, its impact on the world stage does depend on having the right type of personality and ability as Secretary General.

[END OF AUDIOFILE]